

## ECONOMIC ACCEPTANCE OF WORK. GENESIS AND EVOLUTION

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**Abstract:** *The concept of work knows a lot of different approaches in literature starting from religious and mythological roots and up to a range of modern definitions presenting the concept throughout its components or areas of application. Nowadays, work is carried out in thousands of ways as part of more and more complex socio-economic structures. However the world of work and derived concepts is not fully delineated. The given article presents significant contributions to highlight interdisciplinary explanations of work, focusing on the economic dimension. A series of definitions of the labor market are synthesized, and the similarities and differences between them are analyzed. It is important to approach the labor market in the light of factors of influence on it, namely socio-economic and demographic factors. The conclusions drawn from performing complex analysis of the term "work" refers primarily to the time evolution of the term and the connotations it has. Moreover, the results of the study show, once again, that due to work, as a physical or intellectual effort of man, economic terms have also introduced other terms, such as the "labor market", "labor force" all together contributing to facilitating in-depth analysis and studying the details of the studied economic phenomena.*

**Keywords:** *work, labor cost, labor market, workforce, labor demand, labor supply.*

**JEL Classification:** *J01, J2, J3.*

### 1. Introduction

The work has a great importance for people. So, as Pope John Paul II wrote, "Labor exercens" - "work is not just a means to earn money, but also constitutes a fundamental dimension of a human being on the Earth" (Frunzaru, 2012, p.5).

Let's initiate an overview on the evolution of key terms by updating the generally accepted idea regarding the definition of work as a specifically human activity, binding of human existence and society, for general progress.

Etymologically, the term *work* stems from the Slavic word *muka*, which means *torment*. To denote hard or routine work done around the home, in Romanian it is used also the verb *to robote*, which has its origins from the Slavic word *robot*, meaning *work* (Dicționar Explicativ al Limbii Române, 2009, p.84).

On the other hand, Maurice Godelier (1980), doing an analyse of labor representations, has determined the etymology of the word *work* in French and Greek.

In French, *travailler* (to work) comes from the Latin word *tripaliare* (torture trident), *ovrer* comes from the Latin word *operarus* (Man of Sorrow), and *gagner* (to win) comes from the Frankish word *waidajan*, that means *to rob* or *to search for food*. In Greek, there is not only one word for work in general, but a number of private terms: *ponos* (painful activity), *ergon* (work in agriculture or war), *poein* (to do), *portein* (to do, to act) and *technai* (technique or activity that involves some secret processes). And also Hebrews, the word *work* has an etymological root that is associated with an unpleasant activity: *avodah* (labor) has the same root with *eved* (slave) (Frunzaru, 2012, p.12; Grint, 2005, p.14).

Returning to the different ways of defining *work*, it should not be missed one of the main linguistical sources - Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language. According to it, the work is a "unfolding of a physical or intellectual activity directed towards a specific purpose; activity by means of which people modify and adapt things in order to satisfy their needs" (Brăilean, 2012, p.140).

Proverbs that theorize only in a few words what it the work can be found in all world languages (Duduleanu, 1972, p.44): Le travail est souvent le pere du plaisir ("Labor is often the father of pleasure"), Le travail c'est la liberte ("Work is liberty"), El trabajo es la

primera de las virtudes ("Work is the first of virtues"), Toil is the law of life and its best fruit ("Work is the law of life and its best fruit").

## 2. Philosophical-religious approach of the work

Although it would seem that everyone knows what does it mean *work*, everybody was involved from his childhood in domestic, intellectual activities or any other kind of, however, still we want a generally recognized definition of this human activity. In some cases *work* is a way to spend the most of the day and coincide with the individual's waking. In other cases, *work* is associated with the effort to achieve a certain status or to obtain economic reward.

This difficulty is caused by the specific approach of each research area. Clearly, an economist will focus on other aspects of the work than a lawyer or psychologist. For the economist, on the foreground lies the analysis of labor productivity and labor outcomes, because welfare of the organization will depend on, recording of the biggest financial results. In this context, the basic economic principle of "maximum result with minimum cost" is available.

In our view, development of a complete summary of theoretical approaches of work and work market in different areas is necessary due to the importance and timeliness of this concept on a global scale. Scientific researches on the topic are themselves in a complex interdependence, intersection and complete each other (Table no. 1).

**Table no. 1. Interdisciplinary scientific approach of work**

<b>Domeniul disciplinar</b>	<b>The definition / interpretation of the work</b>
<b>Mythology</b>	- The relationship between gods and people in the context of work - The perception of work as a ritual
<b>Religion</b>	- The perception of labor as payment in the account of original sin and the consequence of the paragon escape - Addressing labor as atonement and obedience to the will of God
<b>Philosophy</b>	- Work is a natural endeavor of man in his aspirations for happiness, or an obligation - Work must be consistent with moral aspects
<b>Sociology</b>	- The process of socio-professional integration of individuals on the labor market - The reciprocity ratio between work and living standards, the social evolution of individuals
<b>Psychology</b>	- The phenomena and psychic peculiarities involved in the work of man - The individual and group reasons that determine the performance of a job
<b>Law</b>	- Individual and collective legal relationships that arise between employers (employers) and employees working under their authority when they work
<b>Economy</b>	- All human resources that can and are involved in the production of goods and the provision of services
<b>Demography</b>	- Factors and effects of work on demographic indicators

Source: developed by author.

As you can see on the table 1, it is difficult to exhaust the numerous meanings of the work. It can be a punishment for original sin, a way of expressing religious faith, a way to avoid temptation of the flesh, a path to happiness, social development, volitional act, etc.

The economic approach to research work as a concept and theory, allows to reflect the essence of this concept, to analyse forms that can take work from the antiquity until present, to develop regulatory measures and management of labor relations. In the classical economic theory, work is studied as one of the main human activities.

In Christianity, work was the God's command and also a fundamental law of human life, which arose at the same time with people's appearance: "And the Lord God took Adam and put him into the Garden of Eden to work and keep it" (Genesis II, 15-17). Even from here we can deduce that earth does not give its fruit only those who work. Only animals eat in raw form that what earth gives them. The individual endowed with intelligence and will have to pay tribute through labor for intelligence and will that he possesses, or rather to develop these abilities through work. Therefore the work defined itself as a methodical activity, so conscious and voluntary, by which the individual masters and transforms nature, produces material and spiritual goods to satisfy his needs and aspirations. So the work is primarily a feeding condition, condition of human existence.

God, sinning against Him. Through working an individual fulfills all the life duties, all purposes in the world. "Six days shall you labor and do all your things" (Exodus II, 9). Moreover, human labor is connected with God's creative activity. "That in six days God created the heavens and the earth" (Exodus VI, 11). God gives Himself as an example of work and rest. Work is dressed as a supreme honor, but it's one of the biggest debts.

The act of committing the original sin brought to people the curse to work laboriously to get food for subsistence. St. Paul believes that "who does not want to work, he should not eat" (III, 10).

Some ideas about the work we can find also in Monastic Rules of Saint Gret Vasile. He treats the concept from four points of view:

- a) work is divine command;
- b) work is a factor of education;
- c) work is a means of life maintenance;
- d) work is an activating factor to love the neighbor.

Meaningfully words belonging to Solomon said that "the most expensive treasure for people is working", sensing a great truth that work is the only one factor of goods creation, the only one factor that capitalizes any treasure.

### **3. The evolution of the work concept in Antiquity**

But work isn't only the biblical context or the myths and legends of Antiquity; its scope is of wider coverage. Thus, it is a physical or intellectual activity directed towards a specific purpose: to produce basic needs, for profit, for pleasure or, conversely, is a forced activity, made when necessary.

Since in ancient Greece there were various "definitions", some metaphorical as those of Aesop ("Working is people's treasure") and Euripides ("Work is the father of glory and happiness").

In ancient Rome and ancient Greece, the main labor force was considered slaves. In Xenophon's economic treatise on land ownerships (380 BC;), it is said that the role of slaves was to "carry, maintain and keep master's properties" and and that oe to "plant, work the fields, sow and reap harvest". With other words, agricultural work was in slaves' burden.

In the 1st century a. HR., the roman Varro in his work about agriculture and growth of animals, has classified the equipment in a villa into three categories: dumb tools, semi-speakers (animals) and speakers (slaves). So the last ones were perceived as indispensable tools in agricultural work

Contempt of labor value was equating to the contempt towards workers. A real individual was considered only that one whose free time was remaining completely free.

According to Plato, a well-organized city would be where people would be fed from slaves' agricultural labor, leaving jobs for those from the lower strata. In Aristotle's conception, slaves, peasants and small traders can not live "happy"; only people who do not work, are, morally, according to human ideal (Felecan, 2004, p.69).

At the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century a. H., the Roman population was numbering about 60 millions; about three-quarters from those were working in agriculture. This fact is impossible to be believed as they were just 45mln of slaves, that every free individual had 3 slaves. Therefore, since that time, agricultural activities began to be executed also by free people, because the amount of goods produced by slaves was too small to meet the increasing requirements of the population.

#### **4. Backgrounds of the economical research on labor**

Outlining of principles to be formulated began only in the eighteenth century by Thomas Malthus in his "Essay":

- Population is limited in livelihood;
- Growth of population occurs in geometric progression, while enhancing livelihoods - in arithmetic progression.

Work organization during slave's time is similar to the work organization in present day. If there were many slaves, they were grouped into teams (sometimes called decuries), subordinated to foremen (monitores). Therefore, there is a so-called slavery team. The most defavorised were slaves from mines. Some slaves were doing seasonal work, as for example during harvests. In this case owners applied the wage system which could suit smallholders or farmers.

The English classical school, represented by Adam Smith și David Ricardo, brings the added value to economic theory, introducing the concepts such as work, value, money, distribution, absolute advantage, comparative advantage, etc.

Adam Smith's work published in 1776, "The Wealth of Nations" interpret in a new light the national wealth. Thus, all productive economic activities, including work, create national wealth. A great importance is given to the problem of work division, "annual labor of any nation is always a fund that supplies it with all necessary goods for living." At its turn, this fund depends on two factors: the work amount employed in production and labor productivity. An example in this situation serves primitive peoples who, although they were busy with different jobs, they were poor and lived very hardly. On the other hand, from Antiquity until the present, civilized peoples are much better and easier because their work is more productive, this fact is due to workers' knowledge and skills (Smith and Buttler-Bowdon, 2011, p.47).

The productive work, according to Smith, is fixed in material objects and creates profit. Therefore, the worker's labor in industry or agriculture is productive, while the work of those providing various services is unproductive simply because services disappear just than they are done. So work is useful, but it doesn't mean, it is also productive. The work, done by scientists and writers, lawyers and a priest being useful to society, however, is unproductive. Finally, Smith mentions, "an individual enriches himself using many workers and impoverishes using many servants" (Smith and Buttler-Bowdon, 2011, p.13).

This view can be analyzed in favor of an undertaking or state that is enriched at the expense of labor available but taking into account only those work resources that participate in the production process (agriculture and industry). For the eighteenth century, this reasoning was valid, but not for the current economy.

In Adam Smith's concept the work receives a connotation less positive, since it represents "a sacrifice that the individual do in his rest, from his freedom and happiness." It becomes obvious the human tendency to reduce the amount of time and effort to related work. This fact creates prerequisites for improvement machinery and division of labor.

Based on Adam Smith's the ideas, David Ricardo continues to deepen the theory of value based on work, raising new issues more and more complex. In his view, "the value differs essentially from wealth, because it does not depend on abundance, but the difficulty or easeness of production. A million people work in factories will always produce the same amount, but will not always produce the same wealth. The invention of machinery, through perfecting the skills, by a better work division or by finding new markets where exchanges can be made on favorable terms, a million people can produce double or triple than the amount of wealth ... and thus they will not add nothing in value, as the value increases or decreases in relation with the easiness or difficulty to produce it, or, in other words, according to the amount of work employed for its production" (Ricardo, 2001, p.112). Therefore, the value is regarded as a work product.

In Thomas Malthus opinion (1776-1834) the process of accumulation wealth requires many human efforts. And that's not all. Like his predecessors, he argued that wealth is created by productive labor. In this context, he comes with the explanation that "personal services are that kind of work or activity that, despite its great utility and its great importance, can not enter in estimation of national wealth" (Crețoiu, 2012, p.65).

Many mercantilists highlighted the importance of work in their performances. Thus, Antoine De Montchrestien wrote: "An individual is born to live in constant exercise and employment ... People's wellbeing lies mainly in wealth, and wealth in work" (De Montchrestien, 1889, p.21). The obligation to work of everybody is as rational as possible to avoid production losses and moral decay of humanity. In the conception of Karl Marx (1818-1883), work is a condition of human existence, a process of transformation nature products in work products. However, these actions are not only associated only with the human achievement, but also with alienation, because as a follow of the act of creation, work results are alienated by the individual who had produced them.

George Ritzer and Douglas J. Goodman state that, according to Marx' theory, there four forms of alienation:

1. The worker does not produce according to the ideas and interests; he did not do anything but to sell his work force to the capital holder in order to obtain means of survival for him and his family. Marx said that a spider or a bee build, but only a worker can imagine or build previously that what he wants to do according to his purposes. But by selling work force to the capital holder, the worker remains free only in his animal activities - for eating, drinking and procreating.

2. A second source of alienation is that the worker does not control the products of his labor. His work is materialized in products that are sold on the market according to the capitalist's will, the only one owner of the worker's objectivity. The true individual, "as a result of his own work" is alienated, because results of his work do not belong to him.

3. Workers must compete with each other to get a job. This fact, on the one hand, allows the capitalist to require more work for a lower price and, on the other hand, produces a worker's alienation towards other ones. Competition for getting a job necessary to survive lead to isolation and hostility among workers.

4. A more general form of alienation, which includes all others, is towards human potential. During the work (capitalism) we are ourselves no more, we are human beings no more, we are like machines whose function is to multiply the capital. Work is no more a form of free expression of "human essential forces", but a form of alienation towards the human potential.

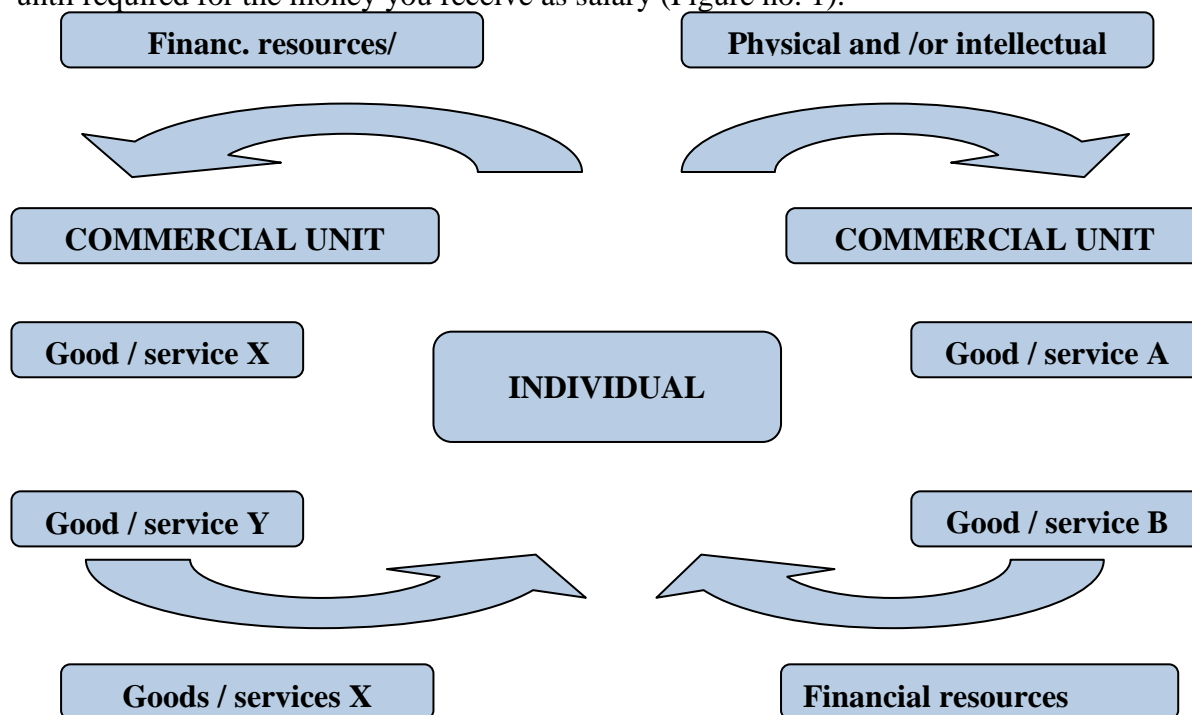
Actually the phenomenon of human alienation is present and it is manifested through performing work against a ridiculous price. In addition, the individual today is like a zombie that do not even realize that he is double working for his needs.

#### 4. Contemporary approaches of the concept of work

Essence and content of the concept *work* is a topic of discussion in the literature, because, according to Ignat I. and Pohoată I. "in all factors of production, the individual with his workforce occupies the most important place. He finds his mission and socially integrates himself only if he is busy, if he finds a job" (Ignat and Pohoată, 2002, p.356).

A modern definition of the work widely accepted by specialists from differen fields is as follows: "Work is a specific human activity manual and/or intellectual – throughout which people use their physical and/or intellectual property skills to produce goods required to satisfy their needs."

It is observed from the statement certain limits of the definition; therefore the explanation of the term is not sufficiently plausible. We can not agree with the claim that work is a specific human activity (or, animals haven't physical and/or intellectual abilities), it can be manual and/or intellectual, and has the aim to produce certain goods. It is believed that precisely in this place, it should be finished the sentence because as follows ("required to meet their needs") is not true in all cases. A physical and/or intellectual effort made by an individual is not always oriented towards satisfying own needs, as an example is slaves'work. Even today, to satisfy an employee's needs doesn't represent the final direct outcome of the work was done, but it takes extra effort of his part to get the good or service until required for the money you receive as salary (Figure no. 1).



**Figure no. 1. Process of work performance and satisfaction of human needs**

Source: developed by author.

The payment received for work is considerably reduced taking into account that double physical effort and time resources are invested, needed to go to the business unit and acquire the desired property.

Therefore, to satisfy a need in terms of the effort is a process consisting of two consecutive steps:

- 1) Obtaining of wage from labor supply;
- 2) Obtaining good / service desired through the exchanging commodity -money.

Due to all these complex relations established between employer and employee, from one hand, and between goods and services and their monetary equivalent, from another one, it was necessary to create and strengthen the labor market with all its characteristic components: labor supply, labor demand, wages, etc.

Labor market is a system defined through economic relations regarding to employment and labor utilization and also ensuring social protection and assistance to holders of this special commodity (Niculescu, 1999, p.23). Also, the labor market could be defined as "meeting place structure of labor demand with labor supply, in space and time, on total and on structure" (Ignat and Pohoată, 2002, p.255). In this context, Professor Crețoiu believes that labor supply and labor demand are not just inert economic categories, but they are all too mobile and active, and there are steady relationships created between them, either of confrontation and / or negotiation (Crețoiu, 1992, p.54).

In contemporary economic theory, the labor market is considered to be a central square, a main one, which in one way or another, permeates in the whole texture of socio-economic relations, the more so as it is, in terms of industrial relations a fragile market, a major conflictual and explosive potential (Didea, 2002, p.56).

The labor market is affected by various socio-economical, demographic and social factors, as it is showed on the Figure no. 2:



**Figure no. 2. Factors, that influence the labor market**

*Source:* developed by author

Some of these factors, for example, assimilation of technical progress, growth of labor productivity, increasing of labor skills, act directly on the labor demand, to increase or decrease it. Other factors such as increasing of available labor resources, migration growth, duration of compulsory education, working hours affect the size of labor supply.

Because of the systemic and complex labor market, Gheorghe Răboacă identified also reversed effects, positive and negative, with direct influence on other markets, able for generating distortions and imbalances in the investment, currency, budget deficit etc. These

effects are: behavior of workforce, the cost of wages, the degree of saving's investments (Răboacă, 2003, p.17).

Univ. prof., dr. Constanța Partenie constituted an array for feature transactions of labor market in comparison with other markets of factors (land, currency etc.) that is rendered in the following table:

**Table no. 2. Peculiarities of work market transactions**

<b>On market land (natural resources), capital</b>	<b>On work market</b>
1. Object of the transaction can be completely and irrevocably alienated against the owner.	1. Work can not be sold or purchased as labor hire of the owner.
2. The buyer has fully traded goods (being able to use or dispose them, sell).	<p>Sale and purchase of work is based on a contract of sale which is strictly determined by a number of legal regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buyer does not have totally his merchandise; he can not use it except for performing activities specified in the contract and within the agreed working time.</li> <li>• Engage (hiring) of work force is done for an indefinite period, each of the two parties being able to terminate the contract at any time.</li> </ul>
3. Although the range of alternative uses of land and capital is very opened operationally, however, holders of these inputs can not use the property, rather than through the market.	3. Holders of work force have fewer opportunities for alternative using of their property: recreation, work in their own household and can circumvent the market, with a great part of their work potential for certain periods of time.
4. Transactions with capital and natural resources (land) are carried concerning market laws, because there are common goods.	4. Work transactions are referred to a commodity belonging to the human being who has a native endowment, education, aspiring efforts, ideals, lifestyles, varied interests and, above all thinks and reasons and contemplates positive or negative.
5. Capital and land as a production factor, does not possess the capacity for self-organization.	5. Work force is the single production factor with organisation capacity.
	<p>6. Owners of labor force are constitute in unions, in order to balance the influence of labor market conditions of transactions on the work market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Unions negotiate normative content of labor market institutions: working conditions, wages, working time, promotion and participation criteria, etc.</li> <li>* Unions can use a strategy of monopoly, monopsony or oligopoly and may resort to tactics partners' intimidation</li> <li>* Unions can bring numerous deviations from market rules, that distort rational model of economic behavior in</li> </ul>



	the labor market.
	Labor behavior is under the influence of inertia because: * qualification and specialization can not be changed suddenly * labor mobility (professional and territorial is dependent on numerous objective and subjective factors).

Source: Răboacă, 2003, pp.115-116.

Actually, the labor market is a market strongly unbalanced. It corresponds to the totality of job offers came from enterprises and to the totality of work requests came from the active population (Brăilean, 2012, p.113).

The ration between labor supply and demand could lead to three distinctive situations:

- 1) full employment and labor market equilibrium (3-4% unemployment);
- 2) unemployment or involuntary underemployment;
- 3) shortage of manpower.

Another important aspect that should not be overlooked in the analysis of labor market are empowered segments, but often overlapping of work: industrial labor - farm work, productive work - unproductive labor, physical labor - intellectual work, work producing material goods – work providing of services etc.

## 5. Conclusion

Work has undergone various scientific approaches from the genesis of philosophical and religious work to present. Some of them are summarized in this article.

The results of the study show, that due to work, as a physical or intellectual effort of man, economic terms have also introduced other terms, such as the "labor market", "labor force", all together contributing to facilitating in-depth analysis and studying the details of the economic phenomena.

We do not want to finish the task with a conclusion, as the labor market and thus work, as economic categories are too complex and difficult to define and especially to characterize fully.

In the contemporary world, the work is unfolded in thousands of ways in socio-economic structures increasingly complex. Therefore, theories regarding labor market remain a chapter permanently opened to new scientific contributions and however many interdisciplinary research would not do this, however there is enough place for additions.

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